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From the ‘Moses of Reason’ to the ‘Khidr of the Resurrection’: The Oxymoronic Transcendent in Shahrastānī’s *Majlis-i maktūb ... dar Khwārazm*

Leonard Lewisohn

Introduction

Born in 479/1086–1087 in the northern frontier of Khurāsān in Persia,¹ ‘Abd al-Karīm Tāj al-Dīn al-Shahrastānī was the most important theologian in the Islamic philosophical tradition to renew and reinvigorate Ghazālī’s polemic against Avicennian Peripatetic rationalism.² His education in the Islamic sciences was comprehensive, having studied with students of the great Sunni theologians, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and the latter’s student Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), in Nishāpūr. His studies covered the fields of Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), scholastic theology (*kalām*) of the Ash‘arī school and the Prophetic traditions (s. *ḥadīth*). He learned jurisprudence (*fiqh*) under Abu’l-Muẓaffar Aḥmad al-Khawāfi, a pupil of Juwaynī. This study of Sunni traditionalism was also supplemented by attendance at the classes of the son of the famous mystic Abu’l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) of Nishāpūr, author of *al-Risāla fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*, ‘probably the most widely read summary of early Sufism’.³ During the second decade of the twelfth century CE, Shahrastānī held a chair at the celebrated Nizāmiyya college in Baghdad for three years. Amongst his many pupils was the maternal uncle of the famous Shi‘i theologian Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 673/1274), who would later go on to teach Ṭūsī’s father. During the following decade, Shahrastānī took up a post in the chancellery of the Saljūq sultan Sanjar, which he maintained until he retired to his native village Shahrastān (currently in the Republic of Turkmenistan), where he died in 548/1153.⁴

Shahrastānī’s most celebrated work, the *Kitāb al-Milal wa’l-niḥal*,⁵ was a kind of encyclopaedia of religious ideas and denominations that

was dedicated to analysing the various sects and religions of the world. The chapters of this work, as Guy Monnot observes, 'as a carefully crafted whole ... remained, until the eighteenth century, totally unique. They represent the high point of the Muslim histories of religion.'⁶ In respect to the esoteric traditions of Islam, perhaps the important aspect of this encyclopaedia is its discussion of extra-Islamic religious communities and faiths, in particular Zoroastrians, Jews, Manichaeans, Sabians and Arab pagan cults, not to mention Hindu sects and thinkers.⁷

Although an intense anti-philosophical polemic, particularly against Peripatetic rationalism, pervades most of his works, the most significant of these attacks is found in his *Kitāb al-Musāraʿa* (or *Kitāb Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa*), a refutation of Avicenna.⁸ As an Ashʿarī theologian, Shahrastānī's best-known work is his *Kitāb Nihāyat al-aqdām fi ʿilm al-kalām*,⁹ which addresses the full range of Muslim theological sects and denominational differences from a Sunni perspective.

Despite his strong Ashʿarī theological background and staunch public affiliation with Sunnism, the significance of the presence of the numerous Ismaili terms, ideas, indications and allusions in his various works still remains puzzling.¹⁰ For instance, concerning Shahrastānī's Qurʾanic commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa maṣābīḥ al-abrār*,¹¹ his largest work,¹² estimated to be 'equal, and sometimes superior to those of Ṭabarī or Rāzī in terms of precision, breadth, antiquity and variety of sources quoted',¹³ a contemporary Iranian scholar wrote:

By studying this work one becomes intimately acquainted with the basic ideas and thoughts of this great thinker, allowing us to conjecture that beneath the cover of his Ashʿarī and Shāfiʿī theology, he was not unacquainted with the teachings and esoteric hermeneutics (*taʾwīlāt*) of the Ismaili denomination.¹⁴ ... It is probable that Shahrastānī followed their method, even if he did not allow himself to publicly declare himself a follower of the Ismaili faith.¹⁵

In this respect, it is important to note that the Shīʿī theologian Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in his autobiographical work *Sayr wa sulūk* referred to him as *dāʿī al-duʿāt*,¹⁶ an Ismaili title meaning 'the supreme missionary'. Shahrastānī's Ismaili affiliation, if only on the basis of this assertion alone, is considered as confirmed beyond all reasonable doubt by many scholars,¹⁷ although by some it is still 'treated with caution',¹⁸ while others claim the title was 'merely honorary'.¹⁹ But the fact remains that notwithstanding his Shāfiʿī Sunnism and his high rank in the Sunni community, in three of his works – his Qurʾan commentary, the *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa maṣābīḥ al-abrār* (*Keys*

to the *Arcana and Lamps of the Godly*), the *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa*, and the *Majlis-i maktūb* – are found signs of a definite predilection for aspects of Ismaili doctrine and thought. On the basis of these works, then, as Wilferd Madelung and Toby Mayer judiciously comment, 'some of his core beliefs and religious thought' could be described as Ismaili.²⁰ Yet a study of Shahrastānī's terminology comparing it with that of other authors that influenced, and were influenced by, him – particularly the likes of Ghazālī and Ṭūsī – which would definitely resolve this 'Ismaili issue', is still lacking.

Shahrastānī's character typology of Moses and Khidr

Shahrastānī's only Persian work, *Majlis-i maktūb-i Shahrastānī mun'aqid dar Khwārazm* (A Public Lecture in a Congregation held by Shahrastānī in Khwārazm), contains a long esoteric commentary on the meaning of the story of Moses and Khidr from Q. 18:67–82.²¹ It is by far the most profound, lucid and beautiful commentary on the tale I know of, excelling any prose or verse commentary on the subject by any of the Sufis I have found to date. The profound meditative spirituality and the soaring visionary insights of Shahrastānī's depiction of Moses and Khidr to my knowledge are not equalled by other commentaries on this tale in Persian literature.²² This work takes the form of a dissertative dialogue, in the Platonic sense, as between Socrates and some other disputant, with Khidr playing here the Socratic role. In Persian literature, this passage may also be compared to Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī's sublime depiction of the Qur'anic story of Adam and the angels in his Qur'an commentary, *Kashf al-asrār*, and to the account of the same legend given by Aḥmad Sam'ānī (d. 534/1140) in his *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*.²³ At the same time, he opens up entirely new vistas to the reader on the meaning of time, eternity, sin, punishment, prophecy, sainthood and a host of other topics. Among its major themes, the treatise elucidates the concepts of creation (*khalq*) and the divine Command (*amr*); the role of angels in the hierarchy of the cosmos, the various stages of human evolution and the cycles of prophecy.

The account of Moses' abortive discipleship of Khidr given in Q. 18:65–82 is well known and need not be repeated here.²⁴ For the purposes of the present essay, suffice it to say that in the Qur'anic account there appear several fundamental motifs presented in succinct, almost epigrammatic, form that are later more fully deciphered and expounded by a host of authors from different schools of Islamic philosophy, theology and mysticism. The six most important of these motifs, to which nearly all Muslim

authors allude when interpreting the tale, can be itemised under the following rubrics:

1. *Esoteric knowledge.* Khiḍr is the perfect mystic who is both adept at and possessor of 'esoteric knowledge' (*'ilm-i ladunī*) or knowledge by divine inspiration, as the Qur'an says: *We have taught him knowledge proceeding from us* (*'allamnāhu min ladunnā 'ilman*, Q. 18:65).
2. *Character typology.* In Islamic mystical and philosophical texts, Moses and Khiḍr represent two fixed, stock character types: rationalist theologian vs. inspired saint. Khiḍr is thus a symbol of the inspired divine knowledge which transcends time, space and causality, while Moses personifies pedestrian reason bound to regulations based on hair-splitting Shari'a rationalism and *kalām* theology.
3. In *Sufi psychology*, Moses represents human reason, fantasy, nomocentric legalism and prophecy, while Khiḍr symbolises divine inspiration, the higher intuitions of metaphysical imagination, sainthood, the esoteric faith and the Religion of Love.
4. The *spiritual guide*. Khiḍr symbolises the spiritual guide par excellence, whether this be the Ismaili imam/*ḥujjat*/the Sufi master; Moses typifies the wavering follower (*murīd*) of the imam/*ḥujjat*/the Sufi master.
5. *Paradoxical behaviour.* Khiḍr's paradoxical behaviour and shocking actions are always allegorically interpreted as expressive of hidden spiritual meanings decipherable by hermeneutical exegesis (*ta'wīl*).
6. *Immortality and transcendence of temporality.* In a number of commentaries on the tale, Khiḍr represents a knowledge of eternity that transcends temporal duration and soars beyond the mutable transient sphere of all that which is past, present or to come. Khiḍr is immortal according to legend, having drunk of the water of life in the land of darkness and is more or less equivalent to the prophet Ilyās (Elijah).

Although all six motifs are present in Shahrastānī's account, there will not be enough space to explore them all in this chapter, so only those motifs most immediately relevant to the subject under discussion will be examined below. Here it is necessary to give an overview of the seven basic theological/theosophical notions that appear in Shahrastānī's character sketches of the personalities of Moses and Khiḍr in the *Majlis*. The following summary should provide a useful itemisation of the basic themes that the text presents:

1. Moses represents a black-and-white, Shari'a-centric viewpoint, vainly attempting to strictly weigh Khidr's actions in the balance of Islamic Law, on the supposition that iniquity is solely determined by disobedience and probity by obedience to that Law.
2. Moses inhabits the realm of doubt and vague suspicions (*shakk u shubhat*), whereas Khidr dwells in the realm of certitudes (*yaqīn*).
3. Moses inhabits the narrow temporal realm divided artificially up into past, present and future. From Khidr's standpoint, such temporal distinctions are irrelevant since he considers the past, present and future to be 'all one'. Khidr claims that time and space obey his dictates, and maintains that the judgements he passes cannot be subjected to any temporal or spatial conditions.
4. Khidr's knowledge hails from the realm of the Oxymoronic Transcendent where contraries embrace and merrily court each other side by side. Moses' mind is blind, unable to fathom how the unifying force of divine love can blot out these contraries, so that Khidr's paradoxes only arouse in him further indignation and perplexity.
5. Khidr's judgement relies on divine foreknowledge (*'ilm*), and his teaching (*ta'līm*) is based on a symbolic, esoteric hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) which gives him an insight into the original gist and intent of every word or deed. All events have already been finalised and actualised (*mafrūgh*), says Khidr, who sees everything impending and in an inchoative state (*musta'naf*) as having already occurred – the future and the past being for him illusory divisions of a single, undivided temporal structure.
6. For Moses, there do not seem to be any explicitly clear ethical values underlying Khidr's judgements. Khidr explains himself in an *ex cathedra* manner as follows: 'in the realm of causelessness (*'ālam-i bī-sababī*), judgements are made without any (underlying) causes; judgements are made according to the Command (*farmān*).²⁵ The terms *amr* or *farmān* (divine order) in Shahrastānī's lexicon draw on both Ismaili and Ghazālīan terminology, referring to a realm outside space and creation that is the original homeland of the divine spirit (*rūh*), the spiritual world composed of celestial intelligences.²⁵ This realm is always contrasted to the mutable realm of material creation (*khalq*),²⁶ the realm of cause and effect (*'ālam-i sabab*) in which Moses remains stranded.
7. The theory of the two rulings or rules (*hukm*) as elaborated by Khidr to Moses, relates, in the first place, to the world of becoming which is impending or inchoative (*musta'naf*) and yet is to be fulfilled, so

that its judgements are based on Canon Law (*sharī'a*). The second rule concerns what has been preordained in eternity where judgements are based on a clairvoyant foreknowledge of the resurrection (*qiyāmat*). According to the second rule, all temporal actions and events have already been elaborated, actualised (*mafrūgh*), and completed. *Mafrūgh* and *musta'naf* are well-known terms in the Ismaili lexicon. Jalal Badakhchani points out that,

The terms 'primordial decree' (*hukm-i mafrūgh*) and 'subsequent decree' (*hukm-i musta'naf*) are related to the notions of 'primordial past' (*mafrūgh*), i.e. the realm of predestination, and 'subsequent future' (*musta'naf*); i.e. the realm of free will. According to Shi'i theology, mankind dwells between these two realms. ... [so that] a person's spiritual perfection depends on divine grace as well as personal effort. Shahrastānī, in his commentary on the Qur'an, dedicates an entire chapter to the explanation of these principles.²⁷

So *musta'naf* signifies the realm of the law, which is in a condition of constant change and becoming, and *mafrūgh* alludes to the rule of the resurrection which has already been achieved and actualised through preordained destiny (*taqdīr*).²⁸ Moses typifies the Muslim jurist who judges matters strictly by the Shari'a; Khiḍr typifies the judge whose decisions rest on a vision of the laws of eternity. As Khiḍr explains to Moses, 'I am a judge (*ḥākim*) whose rule is over the eternally actualised, while you are a judge whose authority is over what is impending and inchoative. I am a man of spiritual hermeneutics (*mard-i ta'wīlām*); you are a man of literal exoteric religion (*mard-i tanzīl*). I pass judgement over and command the esoteric interior reality of things (*bāṭin*); your mandate is over exoteric external phenomena (*ẓāhir*).'²⁹

Shahrastānī on time, eternity and the Oxymoronic Transcendent

Besides the strongly worded Shi'ism of the *Majlis*,³⁰ one also finds a great many Ismaili technical terms in it: in fact, there are many of exactly the same terms that later appear in Ṭūsī's great Ismaili philosophical text, the *Taṣawwūrāt* (or *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*).³¹ The most important of these terms, mentioned in the fifth and seventh points above, are *mafrūgh* and *musta'naf*, both of which relate to the theory of the two rulings or rules. *Mafrūgh* refers to the eternal decree that has already been elaborated, actualised and conclusively terminated by God. Whereas in the sphere of *mafrūgh* everything has already been predetermined, having literally

'undergone the resurrection' already, everything is mutable in the realm of the inchoative (*musta'naf*), which is that of impending or incipient degree still in the process of becoming (*musta'naf*), and which belongs to the domain of human laws.³² In his Qur'anic commentary, Shahrastānī contrasts the exoteric exegesis of the Qur'an (*tafsīr*) to its esoteric interpretation or *ta'wīl*. He notes that while the exoteric exegesis is focused on temporal concerns conditioned by events still in flux (*mustā'naf*), the science of *ta'wīl* focuses on hermeneutics, which is the knowledge of archetypal meanings or intelligible realities (*ma'ānī*) pertaining to the eternal verities of Providence that are already effectively completed and 'foreclosed' (*mafrūgh*).³³

If we examine the structure of reality and time/eternity as outlined in the *Majlis*, we find, altogether, three realms:

1. The first pertains to the realm of becoming (*mustā'naf*) where everything is subject to the realm of exoteric time in which consequences have causes, wages demand prior work, and punishment is occasioned by sin.
2. The second is an eternal and timeless realm, which Shahrastānī calls 'the world of causelessness' (*ālam-i bī-sababī*). In this realm, the resurrection has already occurred.
3. The third and last realm pertains to what I have termed the 'Oxymoronic Transcendent' because it can be explained only in surrealistic, often literally absurd, images which take the form of either literary oxymora, or else apparently senseless statements, that is to say, paradoxes. The 'Oxymoronic Transcendent' uses a numinous symbolic language drawn from scripture and poetry to express a natural language of spiritual knowledge which, to our modern sensibility at least, blind to the language of myth and symbol and nurtured on Protestant iconoclastic materialism appears meaningless.

Diagram 1: Shahratānī and the Oxymoronic Transcendent

Shahrastānī's Three Realms of Time and Eternity:
Exoteric, Esoteric and the Oxymoronic Transcendent

1. The Realm of Causes (*'ālam-i sabab*)

The Teachings of the Law of Moses (*ta'lim-i zāhir-I shari'at*)

The Realm of Causes and Consequences

Work and Wages – Sin and Punishment

Temporal Change, Becoming, Mutability

<i>ḥukm-i musta'naf</i>	<i>kawn-i mushābahat</i>	<i>ḥukm-i zāhir</i>
<i>qāḍī-yi shari'at =</i>	<i>mard-i tanzīl =</i>	<i>Mūsā</i>

2. The Realm of Causelessness (*'ālam bi-sababī*)

The Esoteric Lore of Khidr (*ta'wīl-i bāṭin-i qiyāmat*)

The Realm of the Divine Command and Providence

Wages without Work, Harmonious Maturity of Acts

The Immutable Conditions of Timeless Eternity

<i>ḥukm-i mafrūgh</i>	<i>kawn mubāyanat</i>	<i>ḥukm-i bāṭin</i>
<i>qāḍī-yi qiyāmat =</i>	<i>mard-i ta'wīl =</i>	<i>Khidr</i>

3. The Realm of the Oxymoronic Transcendent: The *Coincidentia Oppositorum* of Time and Eternity

The Angel: One Half Made of Fire, One Half Made of Snow

The Gazelle: One Half Cooked and One Half Raw

Shahrastānī uses two oxymora to describe this realm. The first concerns the Prophet's image of an angel that God created half from fire and half from snow. Yet, the fire does not melt the snow nor does the snow extinguish the fire, God having united together fire and snow. The second image, which he explicitly identifies with the first image, is that of a living gazelle, one half of which is cooked, and the other half raw. Khidr is able to eat of the cooked side, but Moses cannot, being forced to make a fire for himself to cook the raw side.³⁴ Shahrastānī's explanation of the oxymoron of the angel in his *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* in this context merits citation:

[Examining] the image of the angel, half of which was fire and half of which was ice, [it should be understood that] the fire side relates to what

has been already actualised and consummated (*mafrūgh*), and the ice side to what is still in the process of becoming (*musta'naf*). Just as fire does not melt ice nor ice extinguish fire, likewise the rule of what is already actualised and consummated does not invalidate the rule of what is still in the process of becoming. Therefore the Prophet of God transposed those speculations [made by Abū Bakr and 'Umar] to that 'angel'. Then, when they requested him to set the matter straight, after the decree [was given by the Prophet], they asked, 'If the matter is finished with, then what is action for?' and he replied, 'Act! For all is disposed towards what it has been created for.' Thus, he ruled in favour of both their judgements, since his statement 'Act!' alludes to the rule of what is still in the process of becoming, and his saying that 'all is disposed towards what it has been created for' alludes to the rule of what has been already actualised and consummated.³⁵

In short, the nature of Khidr's realm can only be expressed by paradoxes and transcendent oxymora. The oxymoron of the gazelle, one side cooked and one side uncooked, depicts Khidr's situation perfectly. The gazelle itself symbolises the present moment which flies past too quickly for mortal men to catch; its uncooked side is the past that seems unbaked and which cannot be eaten in any case; its cooked side is the future which is already roasted and ready for consumption for the immortal man, Khidr. Moses is stranded unbaked in the past, he doesn't understand what is happening, that is, he cannot catch up with (the gazelle's fleeting past) the present moment, much less comprehend the baked side of eternity's sunrise, where the future has already been actualised.

In the wider context of world mysticism, it should be stressed that this oxymoronic realm is a commonplace in mystical, particularly Spanish Catholic, literature as well. St Teresa of Avila (d. 1582), the famous Carmelite mystic, expresses the connection between the fire of love's divine passion and the water of love's grief (tears) as follows:

If the water which falls on our fire comes from heaven, it will not extinguish it; it will rather quicken it. The fire and water are not opposites, but come from the same land. Do not be afraid that one element will destroy the other; on the contrary, each helps the other achieve its effect. The water of true tears – tears which are shed in real prayer – is a gift of the King of Heaven and this water makes the fire burn with a stronger and lasting flame. The fire, in turn, helps the water in its cooling. O my God! How beautiful, how wonderful it is, that fire should cool.³⁶

Khidr's/ Shahrastānī's penchant for these literary oxymora is typified by the following passage:

I [Khidr] reside in the realm of causelessness (*‘ālam-i bī-sababī*), where I am delegated to represent what is cooked and mature. I act as an envoy of that which was eternally actualised (*niyābat-i mafrūgh*), so I demand that my food be cooked. In my world, all deeds, all affairs are matured and seasoned. All trees swarm with fruit and those fruits all are ripe and mature. All beings have already been. All intelligences have already become perfectly developed and mature. All souls have reached the peak of perfection. All temperaments have realised harmony and balance ...

Shahrastānī's allegory of Moses and Khidr: Between Ismailism and Sufism

It cannot be disputed that Shahrastānī's analysis of the story of Moses and Khidr in the *Majlis* is, to a large degree, based on Ismaili doctrines. Diane Steigerwald is entirely right to argue that 'in order to understand the deep meaning of this story, it is necessary to understand Khidr's status in Nizārī Ismaili philosophy. Then everything becomes clear in Shahrastānī's exposition.'³⁷ She elaborates this basic thesis as follows:³⁸

In Nizārī Ismailism, Khidr has the status of *hujjat*,³⁹ as opposed to the speaking Prophet (*nāṭiq*), the *hujjat-i imām* is infallible.⁴⁰ His knowledge is of divine nature, since he benefits from the divine assistance (*ta'yīd*).⁴¹ He is the epiphany of the universal intellect (*‘aql-i kullī*) in this physical world. For this reason Shahrastānī describes Khidr as being beyond time and space, as having his judgement based on divine knowledge (*‘ilm*) and divine will (*mashīyyat*), as being the governor of the accomplished world since his essence is perfect as the intellect (*‘aql*).⁴² The intellect's level in the Fatimid Ismaili hierarchy is often associated with the divine Word.⁴³

This Ismaili theory of the immaculate imam and his immediate spiritual double, the *hujjat*, was further elaborated in later Nizārī Ismaili doctrinal works of the Anjudān period in Iran, in particular in the treatise *Faṣl dar bayān-i shinakht-i imām* by Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī (d. after 960/1553). In this work, the *hujjat* appears as 'a divinised Sufic *pīr*'.⁴⁴ The *hujjat* is also explicitly excused from following any of the commands of the *sharī‘at*; in fact, part and parcel of the truth (*ḥaqīqat*) that he manifests lies in the fact 'that he absolutely does not observe the prescriptions of the *sharī‘at*'.⁴⁵ His behaviour in this respect has distinct similarities to Khidr's antinomian morality in the Qur'anic account.

However, although the equation that 'Khidr = the Ismaili *hujjat*' may be true in the denominational sense of the word, to interpret Shahrastānī's vision of Khidr's esoteric personage entirely as a disguised Ismaili allegory

of the mystical hierarchy of adepts, as I hope to show below, simplistically restricts the broader, cosmopolitan scope of Shahrastānī's theosophical references. Ismaili esoteric doctrines do not really explain every detail in Shahrastānī's portrayal of Khidr's strange apophatic theology. Despite the quite substantial and solid evidence advanced by scholars such as Farhad Daftary⁴⁶ and Diane Steigerwald to prove, in her words, that 'Shahrastānī clearly belongs to the Nizārī Ismaili tradition',⁴⁷ the 'Sufi colouring', as Steigerwald calls it, of the figure of Khidr is undeniable.⁴⁸ In this connection, it should be mentioned that later Ismaili authors of the Mongol and Timurid period drew heavily on Sufi poets and ideas to buttress and expound their own beliefs, as can be seen in Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī's own citation of several verses from Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Mathnawī*⁴⁹ regarding the superiority of Khidr to Moses when he tries to explain the Ismaili idea that all references to the prophets and Paradise in the Qur'an should be allegorically interpreted as indicating the *hujjat*.⁵⁰ Since Shahrastānī's hermeneutical exegesis of the figures of both Khidr and Moses is heavily coloured by current and antecedent depictions of these figures in the Persian Sufi tradition, in what follows I will briefly draw attention to some of these portrayals, citing Shahrastānī's own exposition wherever possible, while mentioning the six above-cited motifs utilised by Muslim interpreters of the tale.

Regarding the motif of *character typology*, in the *Majlis* Shahrastānī identifies the knowledge of Moses as restricted and confined to legalistic matters pertaining to Canon Law (*sharī'at*), a view, of course, not particular to him, but held in common with many of the earliest Sufis, such as Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021),⁵¹ as well as Sufis of the later classical period, such as Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) in particular.⁵² Moses thus appears as representative of a purely exoteric viewpoint (*ẓāhir*) of the letter of the divine revelation (*tanzīl*), and the lore of Khidr, 'un personnage énigmatique',⁵³ is characterised as one who 'passes judgment on and commands the esoteric interior reality of things (*bāṭin*)'. As Khidr announces to Moses, 'I am a man of spiritual hermeneutics (*mard-i ta'wīlam*); you are a man of literal exoteric religion (*mard-i tanzīl*).'

Regarding the motif of the *spiritual guide*, in the Persian Sufi tradition the Sufi master's purported infallibility vis-à-vis his disciples derives directly from the same chapter and verses of the Qur'an concerning the tale of Moses and Khidr, i.e. Q. 18:67–82.⁵⁴ He also has cosmological functions reminiscent of the concept of the Perfect Man in Sufism, the *insān kāmil* being identified by Ibn 'Arabī as a *majma' al-baḥrayn* (the place where the two seas meet, Q. 18:61).⁵⁵ This conventional doctrine is contra-

dicted by the paradoxical fact that in the Sufi esoteric hierarchy, Khidr occupies a position that actually transcends the rank and role of the Sufi master (*shaykh*, *pīr*, *murshid*), insofar as he is the supreme master of all those who refuse to adopt – or who at least claim under the mantle of his investiture to be able to dispense with – any human master, by tracing their *ṭarīqa* affiliation trans-historically directly back to him.⁵⁶ Thus he is the sole initiatory figure in the history of Sufism to stand outside the cumulative religious tradition of Islam, his mortality pre-dating and his immortality transcending normative historical prophetology. For this reason, he is not a figure easily integrated into Sufi doctrinal tradition. He rather hovers in an imaginal space beyond chronological time, from whence his paradoxical presence pervades the entire hiero-history of Islamic mysticism.

I think it is wrong, nonetheless, to argue – as did Massignon – that Khidr's uniquely elevated position in Sufism allows the mystic to completely dispense with prophecy,⁵⁷ since most Sufis were always careful to point out the theological absurdity of the view which would interpret Khidr's superiority to Moses implying the pre-eminence of the cycle of Sufi sainthood (*wilāyat*) over the prophetic tradition (*nubuwwat*). As Abū Naṣr Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378/988) in his *Kitāb al-Luma'* put it:

The prophets have understanding of the rank of messengership (*risālat*) and prophethood (*nubuwwat*) while the saints have not any such expertise. If even one intelligential ray of the Mosaic light had shined upon Khidr, he would have been utterly annihilated. God, however, did not vouchsafe Khidr this degree so that Moses would be made purer and more elevated. Strive to understand this point, so you may apprehend how it is that sainthood (*wilāyat*) and friendship with God derives all its illumination from the lights of prophethood (*nubuwwat*), to which it never may attain. So how can saintship ever be considered superior to prophethood?⁵⁸

The point made by Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī here is that Moses' outward humiliation was actually a kind of esoteric elevation – one might here recall certain Sufi masters such as Bāyazīd who professed themselves to have received nuggets of true wisdom from cats or dogs, although no one of course would ever dream of entering the names and biographies of such creatures alongside the masters themselves in the history books. Likewise, whatever the virtues of *walāyat* that set it apart from – and occasionally above – *nubuwwat*, the superior qualities of the prophet always upstage whatever inclusive virtues are possessed by the saint.

A similar interpretation was advanced two centuries later by Rashīd

al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 520/1126) in his celebrated Sufi commentary on the Qur'an, when he glossed Q.18:65–66 with this explanation:

Beware! Do not imagine that just because Moses was sent back to school to be the student of Khidr, that Khidr thereby was his better. Certainly not! Never! For – after Muḥammad – there has never been a prophet of such expansive disposition nor one so intimate with God as was Moses. However, Khidr functioned as a forge of ascetic discipline for Moses. The case resembles one who wishes to refine and purify silver, to which purpose he lights a fire in the forge so that the superiority of the silver over the fire beneath the forge – rather than the forge's fire over the silver – becomes apparent.⁵⁹

In respect to the motif of *esoteric knowledge* in Islamic mysticism, one of the most interesting aspects of Khidr's virtues is the fact that the knowledge he communicates is always characterised by a certain strangeness and paradox, especially when his lore is contrasted and compared to the sober logocentrism and temporal, legalistic truths of prophets such as Moses. In the *psychology* of Sufism in particular, the characters of Moses and Khidr came to function as motifs that exemplified the differences between the conjectural faculty that operates by vain opinion (*wahm*) – which is, as Shakespeare says, 'but a fool, that makes us scan/The outer habit for the inward man'⁶⁰ – and the clairvoyant understanding based on divine revelation (*wahy*) and which is infused with mystical 'inspiration (*ilhām*)'.⁶¹ Rūmī thus diagnoses Moses' objections to Khidr as typical of the distortions of the human conjectural faculty: Moses was afflicted with fantastic *vana opinio* and weak *vis aestimativa*; hence, 'despite all his brilliance and art (*bā hama-yi nūr u hunar*)',⁶² the higher insights of Khidr to him remained concealed. Defending the slaying of the boy by Khidr, Rūmī remarks that since the saint is 'a recipient of the divine revelation and one whose prayers are answered (*wahy u jawāb*), whatever he does or says is the essence of truth'. Even murder may thus be justified because 'he is the hand of God (*ū dast-i khudā'st*)'.⁶³ In contrast to Moses' misconceptions based on fantasy, the spiritual level of Khidr, Rūmī remarks, corresponds to the degree of Muḥammad's spirit of prophecy (*rūḥ-i wahy*), which is beyond, and invisible to, human reason.

Diagram 2: Rūmī's Psychology of the Moses-Khiḍr Story⁶⁴

4. The Realm of the Logos (*martaba-yi rūḥ-i wahy*)

Esoteric Knowledge of Experiential Visionary Realisation

(*‘ālam-i taḥqīqī*)

The Harmony of the Apparent Incongruity of Khiḍr's Actions

Comprehended by the Prophet's/Prophetic Spirit or Logos

<i>‘ilm-i Khiḍr</i>	<i>‘ilm-i ḥāl</i>	<i>rūḥ-i wahy</i>	<i>shuhūd ‘ālamī-i</i>
		<i>Muḥammad</i>	<i>ghayb</i>

3. The Realm of Human Reason (*‘ālam-i ‘aql*)

Exoteric Traditional Knowledge Based on Servile Imitative Following
of Religious Precedent and Authority (*‘ālam-i taqlīdī*)

The Realm of Moses, Who is Perplexed by the Apparent
Incongruity of Khiḍr's Actions

<i>‘ilm-i Mūsā</i>	<i>rūḥi yā jān-i ḥayawānī</i>	<i>ḥukm-i bāṭin</i>
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2. The Realm of the Human Vital Spirit (*hayranī ruḥ-i*, i.e. *anima bruta*)

<i>rūḥ-i ḥayawānī</i>	<i>jān-i makhfī</i>
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1. The Material, Physical Realm of the Body (*jism-i zāhir*)

Parenthetically, it should be noted here that this is more or less the same view propounded by Shahrastānī (and later by Khayrkhwāh-i Haratī who cites Rūmī's *Mathnawī* to defend the rank of the *hujjat* as equivalent to that of Khiḍr)⁶⁵ when he asserts that Khiḍr's spiritual degree hails from the realm of causelessness (*‘ālam-i bī-sababī*), where the clairvoyant adept perceives consequences before their physical causes become actually manifest. When Moses objects to Khiḍr's justification of the murder of the boy – that he is pre-destined to become a heretic when he grows up ('How can you ordain a heresy to be present, or judge that an act of infidelity has taken place, when no act of infidelity itself has been committed?') – Khiḍr retorts by saying that the knowledge he possesses embraces all Providence, irrespective of time past or time present:

In the realm of causes (*‘ālam-i sabāb*), causes occur before judgements about them, but in the realm of causelessness (*‘ālam-i bī-sababī*), judge-

ments are made without any (underlying) causes; judgements are made according to the Command (*farmān*);⁶⁶ they are made according to knowledge (*'ilm*), and according to the disposition of Providence (*mash-iiyyat*). 'So this is what divine Providence has ordained for you, it is not Your speech (*qawl*). It is by Your divine will, without interdiction.' That which is apparent and known has been already ordained (in pre-eternity), and that which is intended to be has already been fixed by decree.

Rūmī's psycho-spiritual analysis of Khidr's preposterous and perplexing conduct in this respect echoes Shahrastānī's theodicy here:

The intellect of the Prophet was not veiled to anyone, but his spirit of prophecy could not be grasped by just every soul. His spirit of prophecy has its own type of harmonious congruity that is incomprehensible to reason, for it is exceptionally exalted. Sometimes the rationalist regards that spirit as madness, sometimes he is perplexed and bewildered by it, since he is prevented from understanding until he actually becomes it. This situation resembles the harmony and concord underlying the conduct of Khidr, before which Moses' intelligence was troubled. Khidr's actions all seemed lacking in congruity and harmony to Moses because Moses did not possess his mystical state (*hāl*).⁶⁷

Rūmī explains here that the harmony of the spirit of divine revelation (*rūh-i wahy munāsibhā'ast*) possessed by the prophets is invisible and in fact inaccessible to ordinary rational modes of perception.

In the tenth section of the third chapter of Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 654/1256) manual of Sufi doctrine, the *Mirṣād al-'ibād* – which is an exposition of the Sufi master-disciple theory inspired by this scriptural account of the Khidr-Moses relationship – Moses' lack of insight and lack of mystical consciousness is explained as deriving from literalism. Moses' exoteric logocentric understanding fails to comprehend that certain truths must remain ultimately ineffable. For the purposes of understanding Shahrastānī's vision of Khidr's apophatic theology at least, what he explains about the ineffability of Khidr's esoteric vision here is quite significant.

There is no doubt, Rāzī underlines, that Moses communed directly with God, that he heard and in fact spoke to God, which is why he is termed 'the one who spoke to God' (*kalīm Allāh*) in the Islamic tradition. The most famous of the various Qur'anic verses attesting to Moses' capacity for supernatural interlocution concerns the oxymoronic image of the burning bush that hailed Moses *from the right side of the valley*, announcing, 'I am God' (Q. 28:30). Yet despite his reception of such divine

communications, Moses still lacked Khidr's inner vision. Rāzī explains this by asserting that his communion was still veiled by the intermediation (*wāsiṭa*) of words and speech, and so lacked perfection. The pre-eminence of Khidr's vision, on the other hand, derived from its ineffability and the transcendence of the literal letter of revelation:

The speech of God, it should be understood, is beyond letters, sounds or voice. Moses was only able to hear God by mediation of letters, sounds or voice. If he had been able to hear God without the mediation of these things, he would not have been ordered to keep the company of Khidr.

The term 'intermediation/intermediary (*wāsiṭa*)' here is of fundamental significance. Moses' theology belongs to the literal form of external religion; compared to Khidr he incarnates a spiritual comedown or declension into religious dogma (*tanzīl*). It is for this reason that Shahrastānī's Khidr rebukes Moses as being merely a *mard-i tanzīlī*, someone who has remained stuck in the lower domain of positive religion, and so is unable to comprehend the highest reaches of negative contemplation. Rāzī, likewise, explains this aspect of Moses' spiritual limitation in the following passage in which he tells us that the Khidr's pre-eminence in knowledge lay in his 'submitting to being taught from the divine presence without any intermediary (*ta'allum-i 'ulūm azḥaḍrat bī-wāsiṭa*),'

And that [pre-eminence] can only be realised when the blemish and stain of all the spiritual, intelligible, traditionally narrated sciences as well as what is learned through the senses/sensory experience (*'ulūm-i rūḥānī u 'aqlī u sam'ī u ḥissī*) is washed clean from the slate of the heart. For as long as there is any trace of these types of sciences left as a mark upon the heart's slate, they will preoccupy the heart and hinder its capacity to receive knowledge directly from the divine presence without any intermediary. Although Moses had acquired knowledge of the Torah, his knowledge was still obtained by the intermediary of the stone tablets: *And we inscribed for him, upon the tablets.* [Q. 7:145] So, one of the benefits in keeping the company of Khidr for Moses lay in his becoming disposed and susceptible to receive the divine writ directly from God in his heart without the inconvenience of reading those stone tablets.⁶⁸

In a word, as can be seen from the various Sufi exegeses (Sulamī, Maybudī, Rūmī, Rāzī), of the story cited above, Shahrastānī's exegesis of the Moses and Khidr legend in the *Majlis* shares much in common with traditional Sufi hermeneutics. Even if much of his terminology may be of Ismaili provenance, his exegesis owes just as much to the mystical culture of the

Persian Sufi tradition as to the theology of classical Ismailism.

From Shahrastānī's Khidr to Shelley's Ahasureus

In the foregoing section, I have drawn attention to some of the key Sufi interpretations of Moses' literal-minded exoteric personality, Khidr's enigmatic character and esoteric lore, and indicated how the motifs of their *character psychology*, Khidr as *the spiritual guide*, Khidr's *esoteric knowledge* and the *Sufi psychology* of both figures in the Islamic mystical tradition can aid our understanding of Shahrastānī's literary portrayal and metaphysical allegory of their relationship, and also place his *Majlis* in the broader context of mystical Islam. However, Shahrastānī's visionary insights into Khidr's deeds and words also belong to the far more significant and yet broader context of comparative world mysticism and literature, to which I would here like to draw attention.

As will have been noticed by the discerning reader, in the last section little was mentioned about the motif of Khidr's *immortality* in the Sufi tradition. It is to this aspect of his character that I would now like to turn in what follows, endeavouring to show the timelessness of his character as he appears under the guise of Elijah in the poetry of William Blake and the figure of the mysterious Wandering Jew who is named Ahasureus in Shelley's epic poem *Hellas*. To introduce these literary comparisons it will be useful first to refer to Henry Corbin's and Carl Jung's interpretations of this motif, which assist us in understanding the motif of his *immortality* within wider spiritual and intellectual contexts.

Shahrastānī characterised Khidr as a transcendent being of immortal vision who is beyond place and time, situated in the realm of the 'resurrection of the life hereafter' (*qiyāmat*). Khidr exemplifies the esoteric dimension (*bāṭin*) of the adept who understands the Scripture through its inner hermeneutic exegesis (*ta'wīl*). As Henry Corbin explains:

Khidr initiates Moses 'into the science of predestination'. Thus he reveals himself to be the repository of an inspired divine science, superior to the law (*sharī'a*); thus Khidr is superior to Moses in so far as Moses is a prophet invested with the mission of revealing a *sharī'a*. He reveals to Moses precisely the secret, mystic truth (*ḥaqīqa*) that transcends the *sharī'a*, and this explains why the spirituality inaugurated by Khidr is free from the servitude of the literal religion.⁶⁹

In his commentary on Q. 18:65–82, Carl Jung touches on perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Shahrastānī's vision of Khidr's personality, namely

the motif of *immortality* and *transcendence of time*. Jung also draws attention to the motif of the *spiritual guide*, underlining that the psychological function of Khidr as being a symbol of the initiate's higher immortal Self: 'He is analogous to the Second Adam ... He is the counsellor, a Paraclete, "Brother Khidr". Anyway Moses accepts him as a higher consciousness and looks up to him for instruction.'⁷⁰ Jung identifies Khidr with the fish which Moses' servant, while travelling, had left behind at *the place where the two seas meet* (Q. 18:61), and which then miraculously revived and found its way into the ocean. It is at this juncture in the story that Khidr appears, which makes him 'mysteriously connected with the disappearance of the fish. It looks almost as if he himself had been the fish ... Where the fish disappears, there is the birthplace of Khidr. The immortal being issues from something humble and forgotten, indeed, from a wholly improbable source. This is a familiar motif of the hero's birth and need not be documented here.'⁷¹ Jung concludes that both tales in this Qur'anic Sura – of Moses and his servant (Joshua ben Nun), and of Moses and Khidr – are connected to the symbolism of rites of death and rebirth. Khidr functions as a projection of the timeless sense of immortality that is realised during this experience:

The intuition of immortality which makes itself felt during the transformation is connected with the peculiar nature of the unconscious. It is, in a sense, non-spatial and non-temporal ... The feeling of immortality, it seems to me, has its origin in a peculiar feeling of extension in space and time.⁷²

Setting aside the obvious theological differences between Jung's archetypal psychology and traditional Islamic metaphysics, the motif of *immortality* to which Jung draws attention clearly illuminates the psychological effect one experiences when reading Shahrastānī's dramatic literary evocation of the soaring flights of Khidr's meditations on the laws of eternity that never deign to condescend to solve the petty moral and religious dilemmas of this lower temporal realm. Shahrastānī evokes this motif of *immortality* in the *Majlis* using well-known Nizārī Ismaili terminology, viewing Khidr as an adept in the mysterious and timeless 'justice of the resurrection' that occurs at the end of time.⁷³ And (as Jung postulated), the figure of Khidr portrayed by Shahrastānī likewise functions as a symbol of the self's immortality, alluding to the motif of an *esoteric knowledge* that is beyond time and space. In a key passage, we read how Khidr rebukes Moses for his purely mundane orientation:

Yesterday, today and tomorrow are all temporal: they all pertain to time. And you, of course, being a temporally-bound man, a man of 'the times', you pass judgement according to 'the times'. But I am not a 'man of the times': yesterday, tomorrow and today to me are all one. Whatever shall come into existence in the future has already occurred for me. The tyrant who 'shall come in the future' has already visited me. The infidelity of that child, that is bound to occur, has for me already happened. The wall that shall crumble for me has already fallen down. Therefore, I don't pass judgement according to 'the times', for the judgement I pass is not a temporal one; it transcends time. You must spend an entire year wandering about to find me, whereas I can find you instantaneously, in a single moment travelling from East to West. Time and Space obey my dictates. I transcend Space and Time, so that all the judgements I pass are not subject to temporal or spatial conditions, nor pertain to what is temporal.⁷⁴

Having shown, I hope, how Jung may help to illuminate Shahrastānī's exegesis of the motif of *immortality* in this tale, I will now conclude by turning to an important literary parallel to Khidr in English romantic literature, which sheds even more light on this motif.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (d. 1822) was an unrivalled master of mythological themes and complex symbolic figures, in the handling of which he stands with Spenser, Milton, Blake, Coleridge and Keats above all other English poets except Shakespeare.⁷⁵ He was profoundly learned not only in the Platonic tradition (having translated the *Symposium* from Greek into English), but was well versed in Indian, Kabbalistic and Hermetic works of metaphysical gnosis. Furthermore, he was deeply influenced by Persian Sufi poetry, having composed imitations of some of the ghazals of Ḥāfiz.⁷⁶ It is thus entirely in order to compare his type of Platonic hermeticism with traditions of Islamic gnosis such as Shahrastānī's as well as works in the Sufi tradition. The comparisons about to be made are also particularly apt insofar as Shelley's verses cited are spoken by the figure of the Wandering Jew – Ahasureus – who has also sometimes been conflated with Khidr by Muslim authors.⁷⁷ In the poem, Ahasureus addresses a Muslim Sultan – Mahmud – whose kingdom in Greece (and hence the title of Shelley's dramatic poem: *Hellas*) is on the verge of being overthrown. Many of the motifs attributed to Khidr in Islamic literature also typify and characterise Ahasureus. Like Khidr, Ahasureus possesses *esoteric knowledge*: he is famous for having 'attained sovereignty and science/Over those strong and secret things and thoughts/Which other fear and know not'.⁷⁸ Ahasureus is described as one who dwells in a sea cavern⁷⁹ which, in symbolic terms, is the same mythological realm of impenetrable darkness to which Khidr is associated by legend.⁸⁰ As with Khidr, the motif of

immortality also characterises Ahasureus.

Just as with Moses' pursuit of Khiḍr's esoteric lore, Sultan Mahmud seeks the wisdom of Ahasureus in order to reveal the future of his temporal worldly kingdom to him, believing him to be an expert in the art of prognostication. As we read the following oracular utterance of Ahasureus, the Wandering Jew, it is clear that it expresses perfectly, albeit by poetic paraphrase, Shahrastānī's/Khiḍr's evocations of a timeless wisdom for which 'yesterday, tomorrow, and today ... are all one'. Like Shahrastānī's dramatic speeches addressed to Moses in the *Majlis* and put into Khiḍr's mouth, Ahasureus' predictions to Sultan Mahmud are all couched in confusing paradoxes describing the weird realm of the Ozymoronic Transcendent. His pronouncements astonish and confound the worldly Mahmud. Asking the Wandering Jew to predict the outcome of his next battle, Ahasureus replies

Sultan! Talk no more
 Of thee and me, the future and the past;
 But look on that which cannot change—the One,
 The unborn and the undying. Earth and Ocean,
 Spacer, and the isles of life or light that gem
 The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
 This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
 With all its cressets of immortal fire,
 Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
 Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them
 As Calpe the Atlantic clouds—this Whole
 Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
 With all the silent or tempestuous workings
 By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
 Is but a vision; all that it inherits
 Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles, and dreams;
 Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
 The future and the past are idle shadows
 Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being;
 Nought is but that which feels itself to be.⁸¹

**Mistake me not! All is contained in each.
 Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
 Is that which has been or will be, to that
 Which is—the absent to the present, Thought
 Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
 Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
 They are what that which they regard appears,

The stuff whence mutability can weave
 All that it has dominion o'er—worlds, worms,
 Empires, and superstitions. What has thought
 To do with time, or place or circumstance?
 Wouldst thou behold the future?—ask and have!
 Knock and it shall be opened—look and lo!
 The coming age is shadowed on the past
 As on a glass.⁸²

Ahasureus' message of timeless universal wisdom beyond the reach of human reason and imagination is more or less identical with the transcendental truths spoken by Khidr in Shahrastānī's exegesis of Q. 18:65–82, representing the same prophetic voice of truth surpassing the vagaries of conventional morality and the vicissitudes of temporal truths.

To my mind, perhaps the most significant philosophical aspect of Shahrastānī's imaginary dialogue between Moses and Khidr is his emphasis on the Sufi motif of Khidr's *immortality*, his transcendence of 'all that mutability holds sway o'er', as Shelley says. Shahrastānī's use of Ismaili terminology to expose and expound this fundamental theme of comparative world mysticism not only enriches the Islamic tradition but, if interpreted in terms of the kind of prophetic consciousness found in the poetry of a Blake or a Shelley, proves indeed that the figures of Idrīs (Enoch/Hermes), Ilyās (Elijah), Jesus and Khidr, who are often viewed in the Islamic tradition as prophets withdrawn from the eyes of men and who inhabit the hidden realm (*ghayb*),⁸³ are still actually eternally living beings, regardless in which religious spheres their literary incarnation may appear today. Perhaps this is the message of Blake's verses:

Los⁸⁴ is by mortals nam'd Time, Enitharmon⁸⁵ is nam'd Space:
 But they depict him bald & aged who is in eternal youth
 All powerful and his locks flourish like the brows of morning:
 He is the Spirit of Prophecy, the ever apparent Elias.
 Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Time's swiftness,
 Which is the swiftest of all things, all were eternal torment.
 All the Gods of the Kingdom of Earth labour in Los's Halls:
 Every one is a fallen Son of the Spirit of Prophecy.⁸⁶

In its imaginative scope and philosophical depth – with Moses and Khidr debating a series of wide-ranging themes encompassing the literal revelation of external religion (*tanzīl*) vs. its esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*), freewill vs. predestination, the causeless truths of eternity vs. the temporal laws of this world – Shahrastānī is stunning in his daring and depth. In the end,

Khiḍr's apparently irrational abrogation of religious laws is shown to be an exact mirror-image of the wild events that took place in Moses' own youth. The ever living sage's conduct is thus justified on solid scriptural-theological grounds and pedagogical principles by Shahrastānī, and even analysed in terms of the psychology of Moses' personality!⁸⁷ With its startling insights, Shahrastānī's treatise remains an illuminating commentary on the Moses–Khiḍr legend that is unequalled in the annals of Persian literature. This work is a wonderful example of how the 'sober' Muslim theological imagination can scale the peaks of apophatic theology, articulating the same ecstatic insights that one normally associates only with the likes of 'drunken' Sufis such as Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Rūzbihān Baqlī or Rūmī.

Notes

1. Guy Monnot, 'al-Shahrastānī', *EI2*, vol. 9, p. 214. Most of the circumstances for Shahrastānī's biography can be found in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa anba' abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1367/1948), vol. III, pp. 403 ff. (no. 583); tr. William MacGuckin de Slane, *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary* (Paris, 1892–1897), vol. 2, pp. 675f.
2. Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1964), pp. 261–262.
3. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1975), p. 88.
4. Guy Monnot, 'al-Shahrastānī', *EI2*, vol. 9, p. 215.
5. Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. William Cureton (London, 1842–1846); tr. Adbul-Khalīq Kāzī and J. G. Flynn as *Muslim Sects and Divisions in Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-Niḥal* (London, 1984); French tr., Daniel Gimaret, Jean Jolivet and Guy Monnot, *Livre des religions et des sectes* (Louvain, 1986–1993); Persian tr. by Muṣṭafā Khāliqād Hāshimī (wr. 1021/1612) in Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā Jalālī Nā'inī, ed., *Tawḍīḥ al-Milal: tarjuma-yi Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal* (Tehran, 1358 Sh./1979).
6. Guy Monnot, 'al-Shahrastānī', *EI2*, vol. 9, p. 216.
7. Shahrastānī's section on Hindu and Buddhist sects and schools ('*Ārā' al-Hind*') from the *Milal* was translated by Bruce Lawrence as *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions* (The Hague, 1976).
8. Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Muṣāra'a al-falāsifa*, ed. and English tr. Toby Mayer and Wilferd Madelung as *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (London, 2001).
9. Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb Nihāyat al-aqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. and tr. Alfred Guillaume as *The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī* (London, 1934).
10. See Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā Jalālī Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl wa āthār-i Ḥujjat*

al-Ḥaqq Abu'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm b. Aḥmad Shahrastānī, *bih inḍāmām-i Majlis-i maktūb-i Shahrastānī* (Tehran, 1343 Sh./1964), pp. 9–10.

11. Al-Shahrastānī, *Tafsīr al-Shahrastānī al-musammā Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa maṣābiḥ al-abrār*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Ādharshab, vol. 1 (Tehran, 1997); repr. 2008, with different pagination in 2 vols. (vol. 1: Q.1–Q.2:123; vol. 2: Q. 2:124–286); this full commentary is not extant, and the existent MS only covers the first two suras of the Qur'an; a facsimile edition was published in Tehran in 1368 Sh./1989; English trans. by Toby Mayer as *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qur'an: A Translation of the Commentary on Sūrat al-Fātiḥa from Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī's Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa maṣābiḥ al-abrār* (London, 2009).
12. See Jalālī Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, p. 47.
13. Guy Monnot, 'al-Shahrastānī', *EI2*, vol. 9, p. 216.
14. Jalālī Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, p. 47.
15. Jalālī Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, p. 51. See also Diane Steigerwald, *Majlis: Discours sur l'Ordre et la creation* (Quebec, 1998), p. 26.
16. See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sayr wa sulūk*, ed. and tr. S. Jalal Badakhchani as *Contemplation and Action: the Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar* (London, 1998), p. 26, sec. 26.
17. Ibid., Badakhchani's pp. 55–56, note 4; Jalālī Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, p. 51. For the number of other scholars who also support the thesis that he was a crypto-Ismaili, see Diane Steigerwald, *Majlis*, pp. 23 and 58, notes 58–61.
18. Guy Monnot, 'al-Shahrastānī', *EI2*, vol. 9, p. 216.
19. Mayer and Madelung, *Struggling with the Philosopher*, Introduction, p. 6.
20. Ibid, p. 4.
21. Shahrastānī, *Majlis-i maktūb-i Shahrastānī mun'aqad dar Khwārazm*; the Persian text has been published twice – first, on the basis of a single manuscript in Tehran, in *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, ed. Jalālī Nā'inī (Tehran, 1343 Sh./1964), and then using two manuscripts in *Dū maktūb*, ed. Jalālī Nā'inī (Tehran, 1369 Sh./1990). Diane Steigerwald reprinted this latest edition in her *Majlis*, with a parallel French translation accompanied by a comprehensive introduction on Shahrastānī's life and theological thought.
22. Steigerwald, *Majlis*, Introduction, pp. 29–31, provides a brief overview of some Sufi accounts of the tale, but a proper survey of authors who have written on this subject remains to be done.
23. See William C. Chittick, 'The Myth of Adam's Fall in Aḥmad Sam'anī's *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*', in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*. Vol I: *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 337–359.
24. This is not the place to enter into an exhaustive study of the role of al-Khiḍr/al-Khaḍir in (a) early Near Eastern mythology, or (b) the place of Khiḍr in later Qur'an commentaries, nor (c) his role in later Islamic esotericism. For (a), see Arent J. Wensinck, 'al-Khaḍir', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 902–905; for

- an interesting, albeit somewhat superficial, account of (c), see Peter Wilson, *Sacred Drift* (San Francisco, 1993), pp. 138–146; idem., ‘The Green Man: the Trickster Figure in Sufism’, *Gnosis Magazine* (Spring, 1991), pp. 22–26.
25. Steigerwald, *Majlis*, Introduction, p. 35.
 26. Ibid., pp. 27–28, 34–39.
 27. S. Jalal Badakhchani’s comment in Ṭūsī, *Contemplation and Action*, p. 70, n. 39.
 28. Cf. Steigerwald’s discussion of these terms, *Majlis*, Introduction, p. 47.
 29. Nā’īnī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, p. 33; Steigerwald, *Majlis*, Persian text and French tr., p. 105.
 30. For instance, Shahrastānī writes: ‘The monotheist (*muwahḥid*) can be clearly discerned and separated from the polytheist (*mushrik*) by the (profession of faith) “There is no deity but God” (*Lā ilaha illā Allāh*); the Muslim is divided from the infidel (*kāfir*) by his acknowledgment that “Muḥammad is the Prophet of God”, but the faithful believer (*mu’min*) and the hypocritical believer (*munāfiq*) will go either to Paradise or Hell depending on their love for or hatred of ‘Alī’; see Nā’īnī, ed. *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, p. 20; Diane Steigerwald, tr., *Majlis*, p. 94 (Persian text and French tr.).
 31. Other terms adopted by Ṭūsī in his *Taṣawwurāt* from Shahrastānī’s lexicon included ‘the realm of illusory similitudes (*kawn-i mushābahat*)’, which he contrasts to ‘the realm of clear discrimination and distinction (*kawn-i mubāyanat*)’; see Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. and tr. by Sayyad Jalal Badakhchani as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005), pp. 43, 44, 53, 57, 61–64, 78, 116, 121. Any future study of the genesis and development of Ismaili terminology in Saljūq and Mongol Persia would do well to concentrate on such key terms in Shahrastānī’s esoteric lexicon.
 32. Elaboration of these terms can be found in Shahrastānī’s *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, pp. 185–186=facsimile edition, pp. 21 (b)–23 (b); see also Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana*, Arabic text pp. 55–60; tr. pp. 113–118; see also Steigerwald, *Majlis*, Introduction, p. 27; Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana*, Introduction, pp. 28–30.
 33. Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, vol. 1, p. 179. I am indebted to Dr Toby Mayer for drawing my attention to this passage; see Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana*, Arabic text p. 50; tr. p. 108.
 34. This story is repeated by ‘Azīz Nasafī (d. between 1281 and 1300) in his ‘Treatise on the Meaning of Heaven and Hell’ (*Risāla dar biyān bihiṣṭ va dūzakh*), in *Majmū’a-yi rasā’il mashhūr bih Kitāb al-Insān al-kāmil*, ed. Marijan Molé as *Le Livre de l’homme parfait (Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil): recueil de traités de soufisme en persan* (Tehran, 1379 Sh./1962), pp. 299–310.
 35. Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, vol. 1, ch. 10, p. 185. I am indebted to Dr Toby Mayer for drawing my attention to, and translation of, this passage (which I have considerably modified); for his own translation see Mayer, *Key to the Arcana*, p. 114.
 36. Teresa of Jesus, *Camino de perfección*, in P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, ed.,

- Obras de Sta. Teresa de Jesús* (Burgos, 1916–1919), vol. 3, p. 102; cited by Eleanor McCann, 'Oxymora in Spanish Mystics and Metaphysical Writers', *Comparative Literature*, 13 (1961), pp. 21–22.
37. Diane Steigerwald, 'The Divine Word (*Kalima*) in Shahrastānī's *Majlis*', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 25 (1996), p. 341.
 38. Since her assertions are based on precise Ismaili sources which are integral to her argument, her four footnotes in this quotation are also reproduced here as nos 39–43 below, in a modified style.
 39. Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī, *Qīṭa'āt*, in the lithographed edition by Sayyid Munīr Badakhshānī, *Kitāb-i Khayrkhwāh-i Muwahhīd Wahdat* (Bombay, 1333/1915), sect. 27, fol. 22; see Henry Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne* (Paris, 1961), p. 31, n. 18.
 40. Abū Ishāq-i Quhistānī, *Haft Bāb*, p. 50, and Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī, *Kalām-i Pir*, ed. Wladimir Ivanow (Bombay, 1935), p. 94; the latter is apparently a plagiarised version of Quhistānī, *Haft Bāb* (see Daftary, *Ismaili Literature*, p. 124).
 41. Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī, *Faṣl dar bayān-i shinākht-i imām wa ḥujjat*, ed. Wladimir Ivanow in 'Ismailitica', *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 8 (1922), p. 23, fol. 15v; this work was also translated by Ivanow as *On the Recognition of the Imam* (Bombay, 1947).
 42. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London, 1975): 'The first being in the created order is the First Intellect, or Universal Intellect, which is identified with the Divine Word. It is a reality that at once veils and reveals the Supreme Name, Allah', p. 167.
 43. Steigerwald, 'The Divine Word', pp. 342–343. Elsewhere (*Majlis*, Introduction, p. 46) she notes: 'In order to fathom the profound meaning of this story, we must understand the status Khidr has in Ismaili gnosis, and then, as if by magic, everything becomes clear in Shahrastānī's argument, which leads one to the belief that he was an Ismaili. Khidr, in Nizārī Ismailism, has the status of *ḥujjat-i imām* (proof of the imam), who is second in importance after the imam. Unlike to the Speaker-Prophet (*nāṭiq*), the *ḥujjat* is infallible, thus resembling the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of the Sufis. He is the place of the manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Intellect (*'aql-i kullī*).'
 44. Ivanow, *On the Recognition of the Imam*, Introduction, p. 10.
 45. Harātī, tr. Ivanow, *On the Recognition of the Imam*, p. 43 (fol. 13).
 46. Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 340, 379f.
 47. Steigerwald, 'The Divine Word', pp. 342–343.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
 49. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson as *The Mathnawī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī* (London, 1925), vol. 1, vv. 224, 237.
 50. Harātī, tr. Ivanow, *On the Recognition of the Imam*, p. 30 (fol. 7).
 51. Cf. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid 'Umrān

- (Beirut, 1421/2000), vol. 1, p. 415, commentary on Q. 18:69.
52. See Ian R. Netton, 'Theophany as Paradox: Ibn al-'Arabī's Account of al-Khaḍir in his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 11 (1992), pp. 11–22; Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 2, ch. 161, pp. 260–262, and Denis Gril's analysis and translation of this chapter in 'Le terme du voyage', in Michel Chodkiewicz, with William C. Chittick et al., ed., *Les Illuminations de La Mecque: Textes choisis* (Paris, 1988), pp. 339–347; see also Steigerwald, *Majlis*, Introduction, pp. 29–31.
 53. This is the apposite phrase of Steigerwald (*Majlis*, Introduction, p. 28) who also provides an excellent overview of the significance and role of Khidr in Twelver Shi'i, Sufi and Ismaili teachings, pp. 28–33.
 54. See Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mirṣād al-'ibād min al-mabdhā' ilā'l-ma'ād*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Riyāhī (2nd ed., Tehran, 1986), pp. 336ff; Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 1, pp. 224–237.
 55. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, tr. L. Sherrard (Cambridge, 1993), p. 70.
 56. Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 3, p. 25.
 57. He stated that the higher esoteric standard of Khidr enables the mystic who receives initiation from him to effectively become emancipated from the tutelage of the prophetic law; see Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (Notre Dame, IN, 1997), p. 91.
 58. Abū Naṣr Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Lumā' fi'l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (Leiden and London, 1914), p. ???; tr. into Persian by Miḥdī Maḥabbatī (Tehran, 1382 Sh./2003), book 14, *bāb* 21, p. 441.
 59. Abū'l-Faḍl Rashid al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa 'uddat al-abrār*, ed. Ali Asghar Hekmat (Tehran, 1331–1119 Sh./1952–1960), vol. 5, p. 728.
 60. William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, II: 2: 55–56.
 61. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, I: 237.
 62. Ibid.
 63. Ibid.: 225.
 64. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, vol. 2, pp. 3253–3267.
 65. See notes 13–14 above.
 66. Steigerwald, *Majlis*, p. 122, n. 154, explains that, 'This term is intimately connected to *ta'lim*, which is the teaching of the Imām in Nizārian Ismailism, whose teaching is the source of the *ta'wil* of the earlier revelations. It is the responsibility of the *hujjat* to transmit this teaching, because the Imam is *ṣāmīt* (silent). This is contrary to the advocates of following personal opinion and individual reason (*aṣbāb al-ra'y wa al-'aql*).'
 67. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, II: 2259–2263.
 68. Ibid. p. 339.
 69. Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, tr. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, 1969), p. 55.
 70. Carl G. Jung, 'Concerning Rebirth', in Jenny Yates, ed., *Jung on Death and*

Immortality (Princeton, 1999), p. 61.

71. Jung, 'Concerning Rebirth', pp. 60–61.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
73. Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 141–142. It may be pointed out that this juxtaposition of the wisdom of the resurrection (*qiyāma*) to the knowledge of the law (*sharī'a*) is completely typical of Nizārī Ismaili thought of the same period, as Steigerwald, *Majlis*, Introduction, pp. 41–42, notes: 'Shahrastānī uses the term *Qiyāmat* (Resurrection), which is part of the vocabulary of the Shi'is. Resurrection means the "spiritual birth" or eschatological event during which the hidden meaning of revelation will be revealed in its fullness. Shahrastānī does not use this term in the sense of a "spiritual birth" that liberates the human being from the servitude of the law (*sharī'at*).'
74. Jalālī-Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl*, pp. 30–31; Steigerwald, *Majlis*, p. 103 (Persian text and French tr.).
75. Kathleen Raine, 'A Defence of Shelley's Poetry', in her *Defending Ancient Springs* (Suffolk, 1985), p. 145.
76. See Farhang Jahanpour, 'Western Encounters with Persian Sufi Literature', in Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750). The Safavid and Mughal Period* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 50–51.
77. Arent J. Wensinck, 'al-Khaḍir', *EI2*, vol. 4, p. 904.
78. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas*, II: 159–161, p. 324.
79. Shelley, *Hellas*, II: 164, p. 325.
80. Wensinck, 'al-Khaḍir', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 904–905.
81. Shelley, *Hellas*, II: 766–805, p. 334.
82. *Ibid.*: 792–806, p. 334.
83. See Douglas Crow, 'Ghaybah', in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 5, p. 540.
84. Blake's term for the creation imagination of the inspired poet, which is the spiritual sun (Los = Sol), symbolic of Elijah, Khidr, Gabriel.
85. Blake's term for the Eternal Feminine. She is the Zenith of Harmony (Enitharmon), and corresponds exactly to the metaphysical role of *Malāḥat* (aesthetic and spiritual harmony) in the Persian Sufi tradition.
86. William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (London, 1972), *Milton*, 24: 68–76.
87. The 'three key deeds' which Khidr performs are compared by Shahrastānī's Khidr to events that occurred to Moses himself. This is also a feature typical of other esoteric commentaries on this tale; on which, see Gril, 'Le terme du voyage', pp. 342, 572, n. 46.